

# UTAH: MISSING 21,000 WOMEN



**I**n labor economics, and economic theory in general, human capital is a sort of like magic fairy dust. Sprinkle a little more education and training on your people and watch your economy become more productive and competitive. Indeed, we often associate high levels of human capital—in the form of educational attainment—with the most successful state economies in the nation. In that regard the state of Utah has long been a leader, benefiting from some of the highest rates of high school diploma and college degree holders in the nation. However, this position has come under threat in the past decade.

This slowdown in the growth of people in the state with higher education is especially felt when we look at data for full-time, year-round workers—

people who work 35 or more hours a week for 50 or more weeks in the year and are 16 years old or older—who make up the “core” of any state’s civilian workforce. Using data from the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS) and looking specifically at workers with a bachelor’s degree, Utah is 0.4 percent below Oregon, 2.2 percent below California, 3.1 percent below Washington, and 6.5 percent below Colorado. If we take the broader view of higher education attainment and measure those with a bachelor’s degree or more, Utah is behind 0.9 percent, 4.7 percent, 5.0 percent, and 9.6 percent, respectively.

What is the cause of this rather striking result? In a phrase, Utah is missing working women. That’s

right, a major cause for Utah's changing position in the overall educational attainment of its core civilian workforce is a surprising lack of women. While nationally women comprise an average of 41 percent of the full-time, year-round workforce with strictly a bachelor's degree, in Utah they average only 32 percent, or a gap of 9 percent. To bring Utah's percentage in this category in line with that of the nation, the state would need roughly 21,000 more full-time, year-round working women with bachelor's degrees.

Furthermore, this gender imbalance is even more pronounced at higher levels of education where the number of women working full-time with a master's degree is 14 percent below the national average and the number of women working with a professional degree is 19 percent below the national average.


Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to this conundrum. There are likely many reasons—cultural, economic, etc.—for women in Utah with higher education to be less inclined to work full-time than women nationally. However, if this situation were to change overnight, would the overall level of education attainment of women in the state impact Utah's gaps with its neighbors and the nation as a whole? Surprisingly, Utah, which had been one of the most progressive states in the past century in terms of higher female education, has seen its position among other states slip in recent decades according to Census data.

While Utah remains in the top ten states in terms of the male population aged 25 or older with at least a bachelor's degree, in terms of women the state has dropped from the top ten in the early part of the 20th century to 25th place in 2000.

Looking at specific levels of higher educational attainment, ACS data shows that while women in Utah make up roughly half of those people with a bachelor's degree, they make up only a quarter of graduate degree holders.

So the question at the end of the day is simple: are these workforce dynamics detrimental for Utah? No, not necessarily. While having more higher-educated women participate in the full-time workforce would add to the state's portfolio of human capital, working in the home is also a very valuable asset in

a state that leads the nation in fertility and household size. However, the state's slowing growth in the number of women with at least a bachelor's degree is concerning.

As the nation, and Utah's sister states in particular, become more educated, especially in terms of post-bachelor education, the state will increasingly be at a human capital disadvantage in a global economy where higher education levels directly correspond with a higher quality of life. 

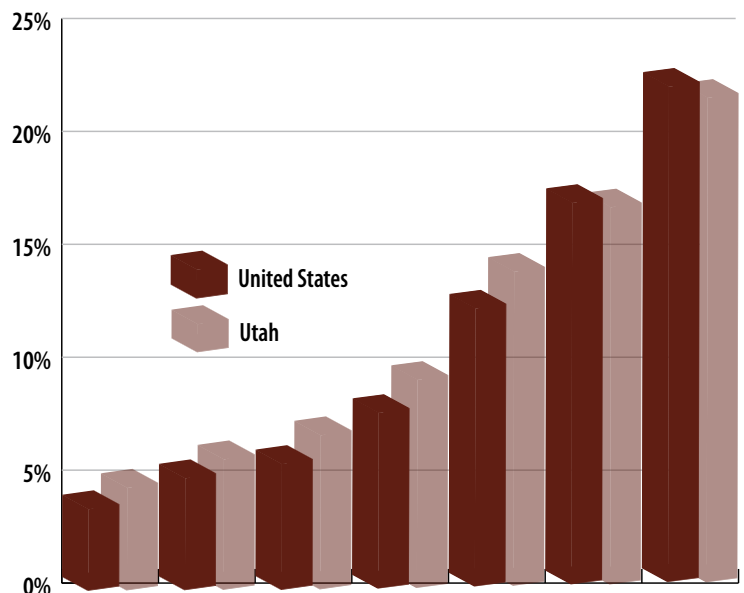
## Gender Imbalance By Educational Attainment

of the Full-time, Year-round Workforce

Degree	United States	Utah	"Missing" Women due to Gender Imbalance
Bachelor's Degree	59% Male 41% Female	68% Male 32% Female	21,000
Master's Degree	57% Male 43% Female	71% Male 29% Female	11,000
Professional Degree	68% Male 32% Female	87% Male 13% Female	2,900
Doctorate Degree	70% Male 30% Female	79% Male 21% Female	900

Source: American Community Survey (2005) and author's calculations.

## Percent of Female Population 25 Years And Older With a Bachelor's Degree or Higher



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1940 to 2000.